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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000515

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SUBJECT: U.S. BIOTECH COMPANIES CONCERNS ABOUT SECURITY AND OUTLOOK
FOR PENDING DOSSIERS

REF: 2006 PARIS 7327

PARIS 00000515 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On February 1, 2007, Embassy FAS, Econ, Science and Regional Security Officers met with representatives of three U.S. companies involved in agricultural biotechnology in France: Monsanto, Dupont/Pioneer, Dow Agro-Sciences. The companies raised concerns about security conditions, i.e., increasing acts of vandalism, particularly in light of an expected regulation which could require French farmers to make public the location of their biotech plots. They expressed concern about the slowness of the EU biotech approval process, and possible politicization of French regulatory decisions in the months leading up to the presidential election. End Summary.

Security

¶2. (SBU) The three companies emphasized their concerns about the security of their information, property and staff, due to the annual destruction of two thirds of biotech test plots in France, demonstrations and attacks on their buildings and on a silo containing GM corn harvested in 2006 (Reftel). Consequently, the companies loose money and data, while staff morale suffers. Monsanto and Pioneer said they systematically file complaints when their properties are destroyed.

¶3. (SBU) The companies asked for Embassy support via communication with the French police services to make sure they treat announced acts of violence seriously, and via help in finding scientists willing to testify at trials. Post Regional Security Officer (RSO) offered to help them bolster their prevention efforts, individually and/or collectively. RSO discussed OSAC (Overseas Security Advisory Council), encouraged the companies to participate in the France chapter and indicated a desire to include biotech-specific concerns in the next country council meeting.

Potential New Requirement for Transparency on Biotech Crops Location

¶4. (SBU) Monsanto, Pioneer and Dow Agro Sciences expressed their concerns about a decree the GOF is expected to publish very shortly making available to the public the location of biotech crops. The level of disclosure could be a municipality, but it is feared that names of individual farmers may be publicized. (Note: While the EU Directive 2001/18 requires transparency, its level is up to each EU Member State. End Note.) While expectations were for a continuing increase in biotech plantings (from 500 hectares of GM corn in 2005, to 5,000 ha in 2006 and up to 50,000 ha in 2007), this new regulation is expected to slow down the adoption of biotech crops by French farmers if disclosure is at the farm level due to security fears. (Note : Emboffs have made representations on this issue, trying to discourage transparency at the farm level. End note)

EC Approvals Process

¶5. (SBU) The companies expressed frustration with the slow approvals process in Brussels, noting that despite EFSA approvals, DG Environment and SANCO kept presenting obstacles. They inquired about USG followup in light of the WTO decision on EC biotech process.

¶6. (SBU) With regard to France's influence on the process, the company reps felt that France's recent abstention on a BASF biotech potato event signaled a new reluctance by the GOF to vote in favor of new biotech varieties, particularly since France has had a fairly positive voting record and technical contacts had signaled that they didn't have any problems with the BASF dossier. The U.S. companies are concerned about politicization of France's position in the months leading up to the French presidential election, particularly in view of the number and importance of products (currently 4 Monsanto products and 1 Pioneer-Dow product) in the approval

PARIS 00000515 002.2 OF 002

pipeline. The companies also fear that France's vote could influence other MS such as Portugal, and those which recently joined the EU.

¶7. (SBU) The companies concluded that an interesting angle to argue for EU approval of their new products is that without these new approvals, increased quantities of agricultural commodities will enter Europe with the risk of containing GM products unauthorized in the EU, although authorized in the U.S. and other countries.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: With the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for the spring, the highly-charged political atmosphere in France does not bode well for either continuing adoption of approved varieties by farmers or French support for approval of new varieties. End Comment.

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